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The Chinese Culture Center of San Francisco is a major community-based, non-profit organization established in 1965 to foster the understanding and appreciation of Chinese and Chinese American art, history and culture in the United States.

The facilities of the Center, totaling 20,000 s.f., include a 400-seat auditorium, art galleries, bookshop, classrooms, library and offices. Centrally located between Chinatown and the Financial District, the Center attracts a broad spectrum of audiences from the Chinese community, the city at large and the greater Bay Area, as well as visitors from all over the country.

The Center offers a variety of educational and cultural programs—ranging from lectures, workshops and classes to art exhibitions, film productions, dance and musical performances, and cultural exchanges.

The activities of the Center focus on art exhibitions, which are presented on a continuous, year-round basis. Major exhibitions have included "Han and T'ang Murals from the People's Republic of China", "Huh-sien Peasant Paintings", "Modern Chinese Woodcuts", "Chinese of America: 1885-1980", and, more recently, "In China: Photographs by Eve Arnold". Currently on view until August 14th is "Daily Life in the Shanghai Region", the first exhibit of village folk art from the People's Republic of China, presented in cooperation with the San Francisco-Shanghai Friendship Committee appointed by Mayor Dianne Feinstein.

Recently, the Center has initiated a cultural exchange program with the People's Republic of China. Contemporary artists from China will exhibit at the Center, and, in exchange, works by Chinese American artists will be shown in China. An exchange planned for 1983 is the first major U.S. showing of contemporary Chinese paintings by China's foremost living artists.

In its community role, the Center provides facilities for the Neighborhood Arts Program of the San Francisco Art Commission and assists in coordinating its activities. By sponsoring certain events in conjunction with more than thirty cultural organizations and community groups in San Francisco and the Bay Area, it stimulates cooperation and expands resources and offerings among the many local groups interested in Chinese and Chinese American history and culture.

Forthcoming Events

Fall 1982: A Show of Ceramics by Chinese American Artists

Fall 1982-Spring 1983: An educational outreach program—slide lectures in Chinese art & culture by specialist and films on Chinese art, history and culture.

Early 1983: An exhibit—Shopping in China: the artisan community in Canton, 1825-1830.

Annual Chinese Spring Festival Event

Benefactors' Circle Dinner

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The Guangdong Opera Troupe

The Guangdong Opera Troupe is now on its first performing trip to Canada and the United States since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

This troupe, led by the well-known performing artists Hong Xiannu and Chen Xiaofeng, is composed of a group of well-known actors and actresses along with many fine young performers.

This group is the largest Cantonese opera troupe with a long history and an outstanding reputation. It consists of four Cantonese opera troupes and a junior troupe mainly for training new artists. The organization includes celebrated veteran artists, noted librettists, directors, musicians, stage designers and a large number of master artists.

For Chinese Americans in North America, this is their first opportu-

ity to see and hear the *prima donna* of opera stage Mme. Hong Xiannu in person. For more than four decades since the mid-1940s, this leading diva is to 50 million Cantonese opera lovers in China and abroad what Beverly Sills or Maria Callas had been to opera lovers in the West.

During her brief performance in Hong Kong and Singapore last year, fans stood in line to draw a lottery for an opportunity to purchase a ticket to her performances.

The opera troupe came on its first North American tour well equipped with a repertory of four full-length traditional operas of palace intrigues and two programs of selected excerpts of romantic episodes as well as three tons of props and costumes.

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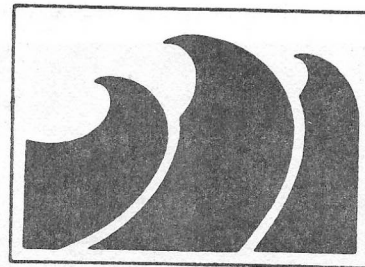


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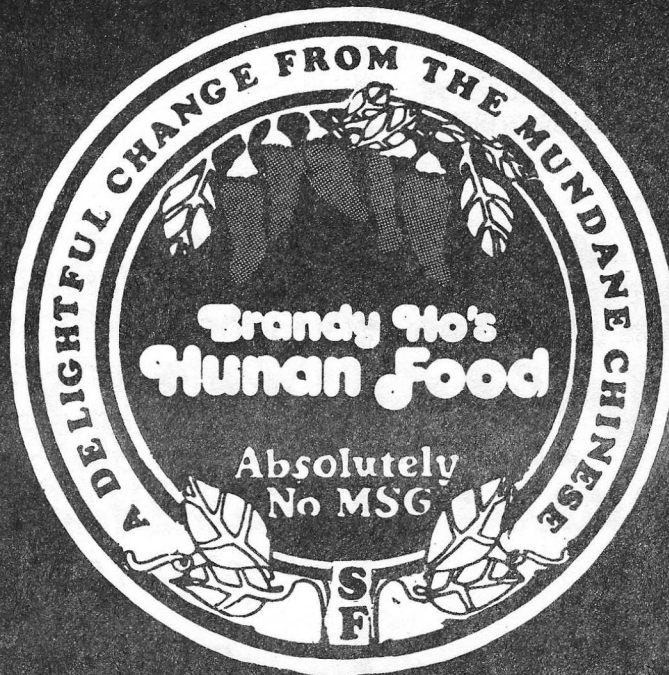
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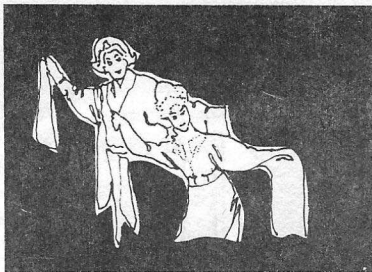


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What's Chinese Opera?

The world of Chinese opera is a world of magical enchantment.

It is truly unique.

Everything about this form of classical Chinese drama is distinctive: the music; the stylized acting that takes years to master; the elaborate make-up; the gorgeously embroidered costumes; the simple stage properties; and the use of the falsetto, an artificially high-pitched voice, in much of the dialogue and song.

Chinese opera dates from the reign of the Sung Dynasty Emperor Chen Tsung who ruled China from A.D. 997 to 1022. Its origins are attributed to the songs and dances that accompanied festivals and religious or public ceremonies centuries before Christ, also to the story-telling of professionals who used to entertain the customers of tea houses.

Chinese opera is thus about 600 years older than Western opera, which dates from the year 1600 when J. Peri's *Euridice* was produced at Florence, Italy. Western opera has been traced to the Greek tragedy of the Periclean age of Athens (5th Century B.C.).

In recent times many extra-long Chinese operas have been abbreviated, but the essentials have been preserved.

PLOTS

The plots are drawn from popular novels, historical events, folklore and mythology.

They are essentially uncomplicated and easy to follow. The theatergoer is assisted by the players who address the audience directly. They identify themselves and recite particulars that make it simple for the audience to follow or anticipate the action.

Most theatergoers are familiar with the plots and enjoy seeing their favorite operas time and again. They derive special pleasure in noting how different players portray the same parts.

Here is a condensed example of how a character addresses the audience.

"My name is Ssu Lang Yen-hui. (Number four son of the Yangs). My father is the honored Chin Tao (Golden Sword), my mother the respected She Sih (Lady

She). Fifteen years ago, in a bloody battle, I was taken prisoner in a barbarian state. I yearn to be reunited with my old mother, but even if I had the wings of the geese who come, then fly to other skies, it would be difficult for me to cross the barrier that divides us. How can I but weep?"

A student of Chinese opera has compared the stage with its few properties to a plain wooden box that, when opened by the appearance of the players, discloses a treasure of sparkling jewels.

The themes fall under two broad divisions, military and civil, with most of the characters sharply defined either as good or bad. Righteousness usually triumphs whether in ordinary life or on the battlefield.

STAGE PROPERTIES

There is no attempt to simulate reality in the stage properties. These usually consist of only a carpet, two wooden chairs, a small table and a plain backdrop. There are two doorways represented by spilt curtains at the left and right backstage.

The orchestra sits in an area, usually screened off, at the right or left of the stage (depending upon Peking or Cantonese opera) as viewed by the audience.

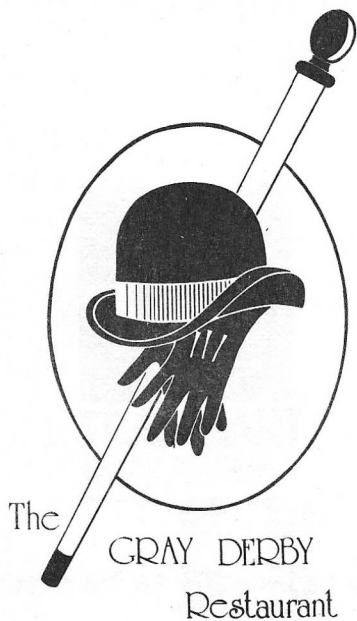
The orchestra consists of two sections: **wen** literally meaning "civil" and **wu** literally meaning "military." The "military" section uses percussion instruments such as gongs, cymbals and bells. The "civil" section uses strings and woodwind instruments such as flutes and oboes. The drummer serves as the conductor.

The orchestra is composed of musicians familiar with many instruments first devised in ancient times. The music blends with the characters and the action.

Different musical accompaniments denote an extensive variety of situations, among them the appearance of the Emperor or high Court officials; people at leisure; a person arriving in a great hurry.

Continued on page 18

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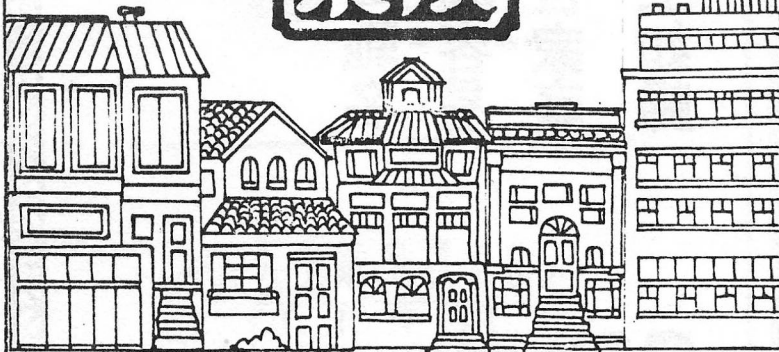


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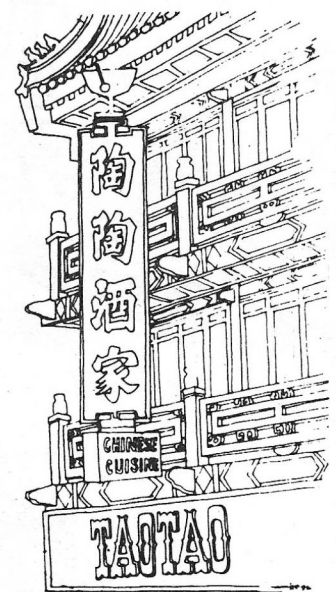
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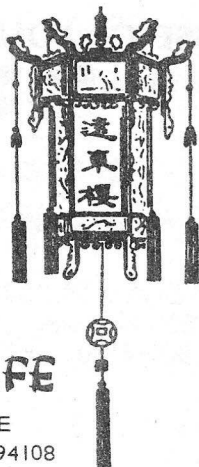
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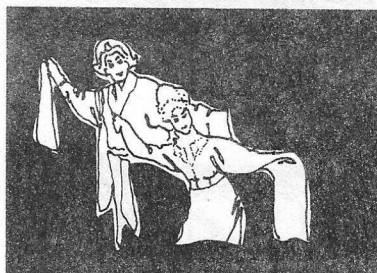
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What's Chinese Opera?

Continued from page 14

They can also signify that a person is a thief or other bad character; a desire of troops to engage in battle; the exit of a person who loses a fight.

Other situations — one book on Chinese opera lists a total of 66 — include a person unobserved as he walks stealthily; soldiers returning to headquarters after combat practice; fighting in which arrows are used; soldiers going into battle; the arrival of a victorious general from afar to visit the Emperor; the departure of the Emperor and his court for an excursion.

There are also special musical accompaniments for gods, spirits and animals.

Other accompaniments include one marking the appearance of four eunuchs and another for the arrival together of four generals.

MAIN ROLES

There are four main roles: the **sheng** or male lead, playing the roles of scholars, statesmen, warriors and the like. They wear no painted makeup and, except for young men, are bearded.

Tan, or women's roles, which until recently, were played by female impersonators. Even today actresses must display the technique of femininity that was invented by the male mind and brought to stage by male performers.

Ching paint face and forehead for portrayals of some warriors, bandits, evil ministers, righteous judges, statesmen, gods and other supernatural entities. Their roles are robust and they usually wear special highsoled boots to increase their height.

Ch'ou, the clown and comic, is alone in the use of colloquial speech. He can improvise and is usually mimic and acrobat as well—a character close to the burlesque "top banana" of the United States.

Each type is subdivided into several groups. Some actors are so skilled in portraying their roles that for their lifetime on stage, they perform no other.

Costumes indicate the general character of the persons portrayed, their rank and status and even whether they are rich or poor.

Different colors indicate the rank and status as well as the character of the wearer. For instance, good persons of high rank wear green; the Emperor yellow; very old or very young people, white. Black for women denotes virtue and modesty under adverse conditions. Dark crimson is worn by usurpers to a throne, barbarian generals or military advisers.

The costumes range from silks and satins, richly embroidered and ornamented, to cotton used for lesser characters such as clowns.

Some of the headdresses are extremely elaborate and are decorated with all sorts of accessories. Generally speaking, the more important the character, the more elaborate the headgear. For instance, barbarian emperors and generals have their headwear adorned with long, sweeping plumes and white foxtails.

With exceptions, such as young scholars or lovers, the male players wear beards, of which there are 18 kinds. Each kind has its own meaning. A waist-long beard denotes an aged person; a three-strand beard a scholar; a red beard a fierce person; a purple beard a famous general, and so forth.

No attempt is made in the wearing of beards to simulate reality. The beards are made of hair tied to a clearly visible wire frame that rests over the ears.

The strict laws of Chinese opera also apply to the footwear of the persons portrayed. The many different kinds include wooden shoes intended to simulate the footwear of women with golden lilies, a euphemism for bound feet.

MAKE-UP

Like other elements of Chinese opera, the make-up is also unique: it has no counterpart in any other theater. The colorful patterns denote the persons portrayed. The experienced playgoer recog-

Continued on page 23

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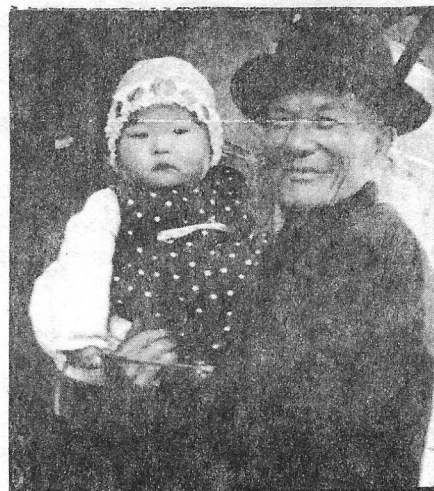
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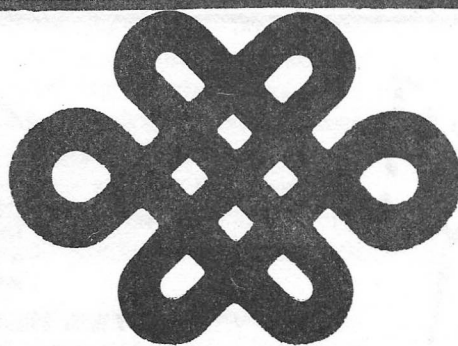
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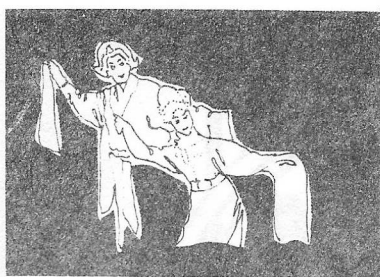
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What's Chinese Opera?

Continued from page 18

nizes at once whether they are evil, crafty ministers, swash-buckling bandits, fearless warriors, loyal statesmen, gods, supernatural beings or other characters. The make-up for men is more complicated than that for women, sometimes taking an hour or longer before each performance.

Black make-up denotes honest, fearless warriors; white, powerful but treacherous persons; red, outstanding generals of excellent character; blue, cruel people; and a blend of many colors contemptible rogues.

It is impossible, without exhaustive study, to become familiar with the numerous "conventions" of Chinese opera. These are meanings conveyed by symbols. For instance, if a player walks behind two square pieces of embroidered silk carried by an attendant, it means he is riding in a sedan chair.

The range or symbolization is very extensive. Movements of the long, dangling sleeves can convey such emotions as profound grief, embarrassment, fear and alarm. Certain movements of the legs, feet, shoulders, arms, hands and fingers also convey meanings familiar to the experienced playgoer. There are, for instance, 107 different hand movements, each with its own meaning.

ILLUSTRATIVE "CONVENTIONS"

There are numerous "conventions," but space permits only a few illustrative examples:

*If an actor on entering recites a couplet, it means he has come from a short distance, perhaps even from the next room.

*Movements of a riding crop indicate whether an actor is mounted, dismounted, leading his horse or tethering it.

*Armies are represented by groups of four men carrying flags.

*A decapitated head is represented by a small round bundle wrapped with crimson cloth.

*Five actors standing in a straight line, each on a chair, denotes the arrival of cloud-borne spirits from afar.

*An actor representing a god or spirit stands on a chair or table when he enters to indicate descent from the clouds or high ground.

*An actor who has been killed symbolizes death by falling down, then running offstage quickly.

*Nighttime is signified by an attendant carrying a lantern.

*An actor portraying a jailer stands behind a chair and tilts it sideways to indicate the opening of low prison gates.

*Two flags with wheels painted on them, carried by attendants, denote that the woman standing or walking between them is riding a chariot.

*An actor indicates the closing of a door by bringing his hands together. He opens the door by spreading his hands apart.

*In former times doorways had thresholds several inches high. On entering or leaving the stage, the players always walk as if they are stepping over an actual threshold.

The world of Chinese opera is truly a world of magical enchantment — a unique world, a world of the past, a world of excitement, fascination and unfading glamour.

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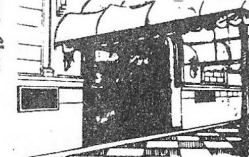
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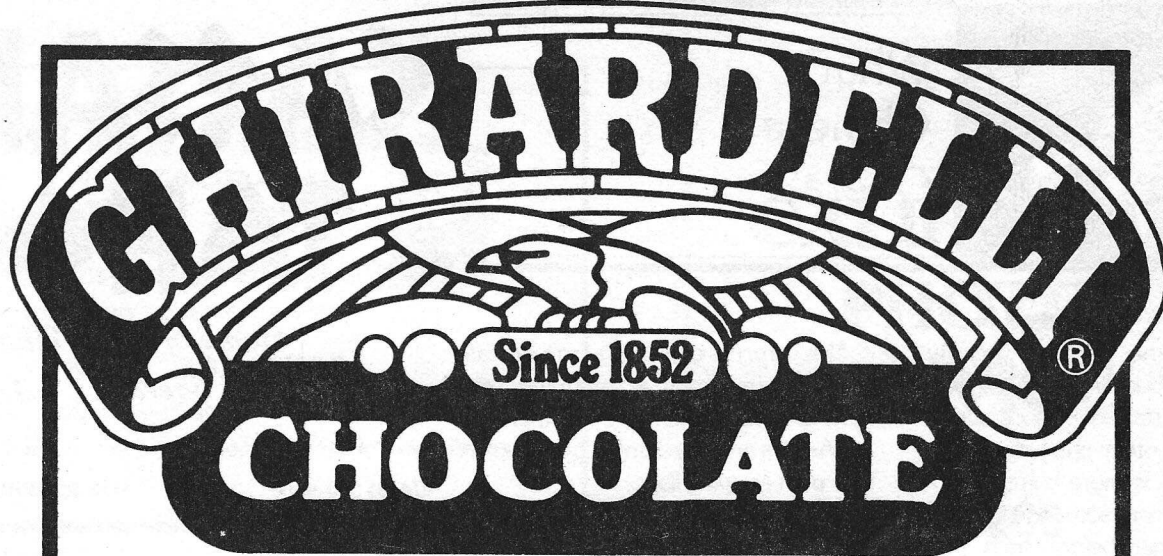
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廣東粵劇團

名揚海外

芝蘭得利朱古力糖果公司敬賀